

# Novena to the Immaculate Conception

by Don Dolindo Ruotolo

## First Day

Praises To The All Beautiful  
Tota Pulchra

*Magnificat*

The Church introduces us to the joy of the great feast of Mary Most Holy Immaculate, with an invitation that she places on the lips of the Virgin Herself: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what great things He hath done for my soul."<sup>1</sup> With this, the Church determines the nature of this Solemnity, which is the glorification of the beauty of this Masterpiece of God, and indicates its ultimate purpose and the fruit that she intends to derive from it: the praise of God, that springs from our hearts rejoicing in grace, and therefore she adds: "Shout with joy to God, all the earth, Sing ye a psalm to his name; give glory to his praise."<sup>2</sup> All the works of God are beautiful, and God Himself was pleased in creating them: all His works glorify Him and for His glory He made them. But among His works, Mary represents the greatest splendor of beauty, the most complete voice of praise that can come from a creature, and therefore the Church calls her All beautiful, *Tota pulchra*, and her voice echoes Mary, whose beauty praises and glorifies God: "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*" [My soul doth magnify the Lord<sup>3</sup>]. And this then is the fundamental concept of the great feast of the Immaculate One, the full beauty that glorifies God: *Tota pulchra es... Magnificat*. [Thou art all fair<sup>4</sup>... Magnify the Lord]

Beauty is participation in the very beauty of God because every created

Don Dolindo Ruotolo, an Italian priest and mystic, penned these meditations on Mary's beauty, grace, and role as intercessor in 1940, calling readers to conversion, penance, and greater love of God through Mary. Structured as a novena leading up to the Immaculate Conception, Don Dolindo begins by examining the feast's significance—the Church's joy in praising God for Mary's sublime gifts. Reflecting on the *Tota Pulchra* and *Magnificat*, he daily contemplates Mary's qualities and blessings, contrasting her with human misery. As our powerful advocate against evil and sin, Don Dolindo urges turning to Mary to find comfort amid earthly trials, sanctify ourselves, and glorify God. Responding to the Church's invitation, he leads us to Mary so she can share her spiritual riches, aid us on the path to salvation, and help us eternally glorify the Most High.



work is a diffusion of His goodness. Order, harmony, goodness, and all of these elements we call grace. We describe as graceful a being that is harmonized in its parts, ordered in its activities, and good in its relationships with other beings. Beauty is the splendor that glorifies the creature that possesses it and, therefore, draws praise. It is the magnificence that exalts the One who created it; hence, it is a voice of applause to Him: *Tota pulchra es... Magnificat*.

What creature is more gracious than she who is full of grace? This

fullness implies the total fullness of beauty, and therefore the Church calls Mary altogether beautiful; it implies the fullness of praise for Him who created Her, praise that resounds from the splendor of His work: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*.

And this is the magnificent theme of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and therefore we will see the splendor of the beauty of Mary and the magnificence of the praise that she gives to God. The beauty that we will see in the Canticle of the Church: *Tota pulchra es Maria* [You are all beautiful,

- 1 Psalm 65:16 DRB
- 2 Psalm 65:1-2 DRB
- 3 Luke 1:46 DRB
- 4 Canticles (Solomon) 4:7 DRB





O Mary], and the praise that resounds from the hidden beauty we will see in the Cantic of Mary herself: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*. In the light of this beauty, we will see our miseries and humble ourselves. To the ringing harmony of this praise, we will join our voices to praise God. We will say to Mary, "You are all beautiful," and seeing ourselves as poor sinners, we will say, "We are extremely miserable and ugly." Looking at Mary, we will praise God as He does, and looking at ourselves, we will praise God as the publican, beating our breasts. The fruit of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, therefore, will be our purification, the reordering of our lives, and our conversion. We gather ourselves also to receive a ray of the beauty of grace, a sweet harmony of praise that must glorify God in our lives.

#### Prayer:

O Mary, O Mary, my soul greets you full of grace and joins the chorus of all people and all centuries in exalting you, imploring your motherly pity and your mercy.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.

## Second Day

You Are All Beautiful O Mary  
Tota Pulchra es, Maria

*Magnificat Anima mea Dominum*

The Church, in praising Mary, begins with emphasis, without preamble, like someone who contemplates a masterpiece in the splendor of light: You are all beautiful, O Mary! And she repeats this exclamation together with the jubilant people. You are all beautiful, O Mary, to indicate that it is a full and perfect beauty, which all recognize and all applaud, it is a masterpiece of beauty, because only for masterpieces is the applause general, and no voice is out of tune in recognizing its merits: "You are all beautiful, O Mary" cries the Church, and down the valley of tears her applause resonates and all peoples and centuries echo that voice "You are all beautiful, O Mary!" Every image of Hers, even when it is rough and imperfect, every sanctuary, even when it is as if lost in a deserted region, gathers this voice and repeats it, because the beauty of Mary is all in her, in the soul and in her most pure body, and the images as the sanctuaries bring us back to her, the secret creature, blessed among all women.

*Tota pulchra es Maria.* The Most Blessed Virgin had to crush the head of Satan, the quintessence of turpitude, and therefore she had to be all beautiful. She had to give God on earth the greatest glorification, by giving Him the Incarnate Word, and therefore she had to be a complete harmony of praises to the Lord in the fullness of grace. Mary is the creature of whom more than any other it can be said that she is in the image of God: all beautiful, praise of the Creator, all love in her Motherhood impregnated by eternal Love; most perfect Virgin and Mother who gives the Son to the Father as praise, in the flame of eternal Love. Let us therefore consider the arcane beauty of Mary considering the fullness of grace that she had, for which she was conceived Immaculate.



Let us consider the praise that her soul gave to the Lord by offering herself entirely to His Will, and the glory of infinite value that she procured for Him by giving Him the eternal Son Incarnate in Her. Thus we will meditate on the source and harmony of Her beauty. We poor sinners will draw this practical consequence: to regain grace through penance, to enliven our praise to God with Communion, by living in Jesus Christ; to unite ourselves to God with the love that seeks His Will above all things. Thus we will see the beauty of Mary full of grace: *Tota pulchra es Maria*, the praise that she gives to God in this fullness that made her Mother of God: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*. Let us consider our ugliness to purify it, and the praise we must give to God by uniting ourselves to Jesus Christ, and by loving in Him and for Him God above all things.

#### Prayer:

We celebrate you with songs of praise, O Immaculate Mother of God, and kindly respond with your grace to our homage. Repel the snares and assaults of the ancient serpent, so that through you we may share in the eternal joys of the heavenly dwellers.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.



## Third Day

The Fullness Of Grace  
Tota Pulchra es, Maria

*Exultavit Spiritus meus in Deo  
Salutari meo*

The Church repeats twice to Mary: *Tota pulchra es, Maria*, and repeats it in the voices of the people, because the mysterious beauty of Mary does not limit itself to a title, to a privilege, to a gift, but practically becomes in Her the splendor of virtue.

God filled her with grace, and grace in her blossomed into a marvelous flowering of virtues. She was Immaculate because she was redeemed with an anticipated Redemption, and her purity is the flower among all the flowers of Redemption; therefore, she herself exclaimed after saying that her soul glorified the Lord: "*Exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*" [And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour<sup>s</sup>]. She rejoiced like a giant in walking her immaculate path, she rejoiced according to the words of the psalmist, like the sun rejoices in its daily journey, always growing in splendor of holiness; she rejoiced like the fertile earth in spring, bursting with a thousand buds and a thousand flowers, and like it rejoices in summer by giving its fruits.

Let us therefore consider Mary's beauty in her correspondence to grace, in the virtues of her life, all pure because all blossoming from her Immaculate Conception and all summed up in the exultation of her spirit in God her Savior. She exulted in God by believing, since there is no greater exultation for a soul than recognizing God and knowing it has a Creator who is infinite goodness. She exulted by hoping, and sighed for the Redemption, preparing for the Redeemer in Herself the worthy dwelling place to



host Him. She exulted by loving and joining herself completely to the divine Will with such fullness as to be the bride of God's eternal Will, of His eternal Love, giving Him the Incarnate Word for Him. She exulted in God by obeying, and in obedience she blossomed with all the virtues that His Law commands us, thus becoming an exalted creature in holiness.

Let us also rejoice in God by believing, hoping, loving, and practicing His law. Let us nourish ourselves on the knowledge of His truths and of His word, let us sigh for the eternal good, let us love Him above all things and practice His law so that His love may be practical in us. Thus we shall repair our deformities, and make shine in us a ray of the immaculate splendor of Mary Most Holy.

### Prayer:

Mother and Queen dispenser of graces, may all those who thirst for God come to you, may the afflicted draw comfort and salvation from you, and may you intercede for us before your Son the King, to free us from the afflictions of life and the perils of eternal death. Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.

## Fourth Day

The Immaculate  
Et macula originalis non est in te

*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae,  
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me  
dicent omnes generationes*

The Church dwells on the beauty that is in Mary as the foundation of all her other beauty and exclaims: "*Et macula originalis non est in te*" [And the stain of original sin is not in you]. She is, therefore, the creature that escaped the clutches of Satan, rather, she has triumphed by crushing his head. She shines with that mysterious beauty with which God created the first man, indeed, she shines even more because her beauty is not merely a gift but a victory. It is the first victory of the Redeemer, who is still to come; it is the first golden link of those mercies that will spread throughout the whole earth in all centuries.

Let us consider the wondrous scene of the creation of man and the sorrowful scene of his fall, when pride overcame him and deprived him of original grace, reducing him to a state of extreme misery. Against this scene, we contrast the immaculate conception of Mary, the Woman promised in Eden, who was destined to crush the head of the infernal serpent for the Redeemer. What caused the fall of man? Pride. To repair this fall, the Lord turned his gaze to the creature that was to shine with humility. He saw her so small and exalted her, He saw her entirely obedient in humility, and He gave Himself to her, completely united to His Will, making her will almost arbitrator of His mercy, making her Mother of grace and a fountain of blessings for all: *Quia respexit humilitatem ancilla sua, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes* [Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold





from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed<sup>6</sup>].

Adam considered fleeting glory and lost his original grace, while Mary was all humility and, opening herself to life, preserved her original grace: *Respexit humilitatem ancilla sua... Et macula originalis non est in te.*

What has ruined us is pride, and what ruins us is pride. Yet what are we? Nothing. Let us humbly submit ourselves to God sincerely, acknowledging ourselves as sinners, acknowledging our extreme wretchedness, and the merciful gaze of God will be upon us, restoring innocence through repentance and pouring out grace upon us to make us capable of every virtue.

#### Prayer:

O gracious Mother, hear the cries and prayers of those who beseech you. You, who triumph over the depths of hell, defend us in the battle against our enemies.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.

## Fifth Day

### The All Pure

*Et macula originalis non est in te*

*Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est  
et sanctum nomen eius*

The Immaculate Conception of Mary was not only a privilege for her, but through her constant correspondence to grace, she became a lily of ineffable purity. For this reason, the Church proclaims once again, in the voice of the people: *Et macula originalis non est in te.* It is the applause to the virgin root from which bloomed the virgin lily of her most pure life. The Immaculate in her conception was immaculate, in her life she was the purest among virgins, giving forth flowers of marvelous virtues and offering the most beautiful flower of her virginity, giving birth to the Redeemer of the world through the work and virtue of the Holy Spirit. In her, there was no blemish and God did great things in her, glorifying Himself in her as mighty and holy, for He made her the Mother of the Incarnate Word and preserved her as a pure and intact virgin.

We consider the purity of Mary, consecrated to God from her Conception, because even from then she had the use of reason and from then on she settled to be all and only for God. She was conceived in the splendors of divine mercy, with a view to her own future Son, and lived in the splendors of grace. She came from the light of the eternal Trinity and consecrated herself as a little one in the Temple, like a lily of the Holy of Holies. She was all beautiful because she was all pure: *Tota pulchra es, Maria, et macula non est in te.*

We are pure if we want God to come down to us and accomplish great things in us. What degrades us shamefully and prevents God's action in us is impurity, from which, alas, we are painfully pervaded. We live in a world



that is all a stench of impurity and we stain ourselves even before we know the beauty of innocence. Let us examine our life, humble ourselves for our past and present ugliness, detest our sins and begin to lead a truly pure life in thoughts, words and deeds. Let us therefore flee the world, the occasions of sin and the miseries of accursed pride, from which, as from a polluted source, impurity gushes forth.

#### Prayer:

O magnificent guardian of virgins, immaculate Mother of God, dispel the shadows of error, move dangerous obstacles, and guide back to the safe path those who wander far from the harbor.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.

## Sixth Day

### God's Masterpiece

*Tu gloria Jerusalem, Tu laetitia Israel,  
Tu, honorificentia populi nostri*

*Et misericordia eius a progenie  
progenies timentibus eum*

The Immaculate Conception is the masterpiece of God and, as such, is the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem in which she shines, and of the pil-





grim Jerusalem, the Church, in which she gleams. In Heaven she represents the most glorious fruit of God's mercy. Men consider the wise, the strong, and the generous as the pride of their lineage. They regard those who excel in letters, arts, and sciences as the heart of their nation, and the brave warriors who defend it, as well as the merciful hearts that spread good within it, as its splendor. Mary Most Holy is the seat of wisdom, she herself is a poem, a masterpiece of divine art, a harmony of complete beauty: *Tota pulchra*. She, strong as an army set out for battle, overcomes all the obstacles that stand in the way of our salvation, and all the enemies of good, beginning with Satan, whose head she crushes. She is supremely beneficent, because she is the channel of God's mercy that flows from generation to generation on those who fear Him. She is therefore our joy, *tu laetitia Israel* [thou art the joy of Israel<sup>7</sup>], and the true heart of our lineage, because among all creatures, she alone is truly pure and im-

maculate, and stands at the pinnacle of all creation.

Not without reason does the Church apply to Mary Immaculate the words that were spoken to Judith after the victory she achieved over Holofernes, killing him and freeing the besieged city of Bethulia. Thus, she celebrates Mary's victory over the infernal Holofernes and our liberation, the greatest glory of Mary, for she, through the fullness of her grace, conquered Satan in her Conception and, through the Divine Son she gave us, delivered humanity from infernal siege and infernal slavery. Therefore, she spreads divine mercy over all peoples, and continues to do so; through her, we conquer the furious assaults of Satan, and through her, we find the paths of eternal salvation. Let us, therefore, place ourselves under the protection of Mary, especially in the spiritual and bodily dangers that besiege us, and through her, let us trust in the Divine Mercy that liberates and saves us. However, let us fear God, for His mercy does not pour out upon the presumptuous and the proud. Many times, we complain of being troubled and wicked, and we say with great discouragement that we do not receive graces. Oh, if only we humble ourselves before God and truly feared Him, how much mercy we would gather from His goodness through the intercession of Mary!

#### Prayer:

Draw us close, Immaculate Mary, so that cleansed from all fault, we may obtain the well-being of the soul and body, and attain Paradise.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.

## Seventh Day

The Advocate Of Sinners  
*Tu advocata peccatorum*

*Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui*

When God created the universe, He created two great luminaries: one to preside over the day, the sun, and another to preside over the night, the moon. Likewise, in the Church's sky, there are two great luminaries: Jesus Christ, the immortal King, the divine Sun who enlightens and enlivens us, and Mary Most Holy, the Light of mercy in our darkness and sins, who leads us to Jesus when we are unable to go to Him.

The true noble and the true rich have a heart more inclined towards mercy because they measure the abjection and need of the poor more. The contrast of nobility and wealth with misery moves their heart to pity. Mary Most Holy is Immaculate, she is a Queen rich in graces and for this reason, from her highest throne, she considers our misery more, she has compassion, she wants to eliminate it, and she becomes Advocate of sinners: *Tu advocata peccatorum*. Clothed in



7 Judith 15:10 DRB





purity, she cannot tolerate the filthy garment of sinners and comes to them as a Mother to clothe them with grace. But how can she clothe them? She, rich in divine Power, disperses proud thoughts from their hearts, she compels them, humbles them salutarily, and pushes them into the arms of God. This is the story of all miraculous conversions that have amazed the world. The sinner resists the grace that calls him because often he does not understand it; he resists exhortations and reproaches because his pride makes him react against the appeals of those who seek his good; he believes himself to be superior even in his degradation and thinks he reasons more than others. However, before Immaculate Mary, he cannot persist for long: that mysterious whiteness confuses him, that beauty full of peace attracts him and gives him a longing for grace; that regal and motherly humility conquers him, and he asks her for resurrection and life.

In His mysterious designs, the Lord willed that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary should shine forth in the world just when the world was falling into deeper abysses of evil and tending towards apostasy. The Immaculate renewed the appreciation of divine heights amidst a corrupt world and called the sinful world to conversion; the Immaculate will save our sinful and proud generation, and will lead us back to God and to the Church.

#### Prayer:

O Immaculate Mary, O most tender Mother, receive the tears of those who implore you; grant the desired health to those who humbly seek it and console all who come to you.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.



## Eighth Day

**The Most Prudent Virgin  
O Maria, o Maria, Virga  
prudentissima, Mater clementissima,  
ora pro nobis**

*Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit  
humiles. Esurientes implevit bonis et  
divites dimisit inanes*

The times are very sad, and if the Church has raised a throne of graces to Mary, proclaiming her Immaculate, we must go to the feet of this throne. Does not the Virgin herself want it? Before the dogmatic definition, she appeared to the blessed Catherine Labouré, opened her hands shining with graces, and wanted the Miraculous Medal to be coined to spread it. After the definition, she appeared in Lourdes and established there a perpetual throne of mercies, which flow from her like a river. Appearing as Queen, she glorified herself on earth, working miracles, confusing arrogant unbelief and exalting the faith, the humble and most glorious faith. *Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles* [He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble\*]. Fill the supplicants with her

graces and confuse the world, leaving it empty in the illusory goods that, in its pride, it had believed to have given to the earth, pushing it towards apostasy.

The evils of the world have not decreased over the course of the years; apostasy has grown and reached the terrifying climax of the most shameless immorality and godlessness. Humanity is overwhelmed by the hurricane of iron and fire that it has unleashed itself. We must turn to Mary Most Holy to save us, guiding the peoples towards the Church, renewing them in faith, humbling the arrogant powers of evil, exalting the Pope, bishops, and priests, the humble ones who bring truth, peace, and goodness, and fill the earth with blessings. O Mary, O Mary! It must be the cry of our true devotion to Our Lady. O Mary, O Mary! It must be the cry of humanity that once again consecrates itself to her. May her maternal prudence guide us on the path of return to God, may her mercy renew us, may her prayer save us: O Maria, o Maria! *Virgo prudentissima, Mater clementissima, ora pro nobis* [O Mary, O Mary! Most prudent Virgin, Most merciful Mother, pray for us]. The Immaculate Virgin reconciles us with God, grants us peace, and leads nations back to the Church in the harmony of order.

#### Prayer:

O Immaculate Mary, safeguard the Church, preserve the sanctity of the Temple, free your faithful from all danger and spiritual distress, uplift the poor, console the afflicted, Extend your helping hand to the world, and may we live in peace as we journey towards the blissful Homeland, the ultimate destination of our hearts.

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us.



## Ninth Day

The Mediatrix  
Intercede pro nobis ad Dominum  
Jesum Christum

*Suscepit Israel puerum suum,  
recordatus misericordiae suae*

Immaculate Mary is a throne of grace for us poor sinners, and she is the Mediatrix between us and her Divine Son. God has revealed to the earth this consoling dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary to establish this Most Holy Virgin between heaven and earth as a fragrant lily and a bed of balm that mitigates the stench of our miseries and brings down His mercy from Heaven. Most Holy Mary intercedes for us, as Esther interceded before Ahasuerus for the salvation of her people. The moving scene of this woman, chosen as queen among a slave people and made the object of the King's delight for her beauty and her sorrow, gives us an idea of Mary's mediation, all beautiful in the splendor of grace and in the anguish of the sorrows that made her our Co-Redeemer and Mediatrix of graces on Calvary.

Most Holy Mary was Immaculate through anticipated Redemption, therefore on Calvary, amidst the splendors of that mercy that was being fulfilled, her immaculate whiteness shone even more brightly, and by shining, made her beautiful in her original innocence and beautiful in the pallor of her anguish, which brought down the eternal King to receive her pleas.

We turn to Mary Most Holy so that the Redemption may be fulfilled in us and we may gather its fruits. What good is it to have been redeemed if we do not unite ourselves to Jesus Christ and do not live by Him? And what good is it to be incorporated into the Church, His Mystical Body, and then not live in it? Our Lady, with her powerful intercession, may grant us the grace to be true Christians and Catho-



lics, especially through the practice of the Sacraments. We are ungrateful to the Lord, for He has remembered His mercy by redeeming us, and we forget Him by offending Him. Before the Immaculate, we must promise to be immaculate ourselves, fleeing from guilt and clothing ourselves with grace. We must renew our hearts; we must also be, with Mary our Mother, voices of love and glorification for God who created and redeemed us: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*.

In the midst of the allurements of the world, we must rejoice in our Savior God, living in intimate communion with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Amidst the noise and rivers of human pride, we must be full of humility before both men and God, so that He may look upon us in His mercy, bless us in His friendship, and fulfill the great designs of His Will within us.

May He give us His holy fear, so that His charity may renew us and disperse the pride that opposes His will. May He satisfy us with Himself, grant us the riches of His grace, receive us as servants, welcome us as children for the love of Immaculate Mary, and make us new creatures, so that the beauty of His grace may shine in us on earth and the splendor of His glory in Paradise.

The sun is setting, and we are already at the Vespers of the great so-

lemnity [of the Immaculate Conception] of Mary. As the heavens sing in their clear winter brightness, we also sing to our Mother with the voices of the Church: "You are all beautiful, O Mary, and there is no stain in you. Oh! How beautiful, how sweet and delightful is your Immaculate Conception! You arise like a most radiant dawn, bringing the joy of salvation. Jesus Christ, God, the sun of justice, has arisen for you, O splendid gate of light! Come, come from Lebanon, come, come from Lebanon to be crowned. Like a lily among thorns, so are you among the daughters of men, O blessed Virgin; your garment shines white as snow, and your face like the sun. In you is the hope of life and virtue, of every grace, of the way and the truth; after you, we will come, to the most fragrant scent of your ecstatic perfumes. You are a closed garden, a marked fountain, O Mother of God, and a paradise of graces. The rain has ceased and dissipated, winter has passed at your appearance, and already the flowers have bloomed in our land. In our land, a voice has been heard, a sweet voice, the voice of a turtledove, the voice of a dove... your voice, O Mary! Take flight, O beautiful dove, rise, hasten, come! Come, come from Lebanon, to be crowned", for you are our most beautiful Queen, you are all beautiful in the radiance of your Immaculate Conception: "*Tota pulchra es Maria!*" [You are totally beautiful, Mary!].

### Prayer:

O Immaculate Mary, let glory be given to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, for the radiance that adorns you, reflecting the radiance of the Eternal Light, the radiance of the Word who chooses you as His Mother and envelops you in the splendor of His light!

Hail Mary...

Immaculate Mary, pray for us. ✚





# The Beauty of Holiness:

## Reflections on Don Dolindo Ruotolo's Novena to the Immaculate Conception

by Elie G. Dib

**T**HE FEAST of the Immaculate Conception celebrates the solemn belief that Mary, Mother of God, was free from original sin from the moment of her conception. This feast day on December 8th provides a time for Catholics to reflect on Mary's unique holiness and her role in the story of salvation.

One of the most profound reflections on the meaning of the Immaculate Conception was written by Don Dolindo Ruotolo (1882-1970), a priest from Naples, Italy. Though largely unknown outside of Italy during his lifetime, Don Dolindo left a rich spiritual legacy through his voluminous writings on Scripture, theology, and mysticism. He composed beautiful novenas in honor of Christ and Mary that drew from his deep mystical experiences and knowledge of Scripture and tradition.

Don Dolindo's Novena to the Immaculate Conception, written in honor of the feast day, provides a spiritual gem that deserves to be more widely known among English-speaking Catholics. Structured around daily themes and filled with poetic yet accessible language, the novena offers rich food for thought and prayer in the days leading up to the feast. It beautifully elucidates the Church's teachings about Mary's immaculate nature and applies them to the lives of all believers who struggle with sin but yearn for holiness.

### Childhood Marked by Suffering

To better understand the spiritual insights contained in the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, it is helpful to know something of Don Dolindo's life story. Born in 1882 into a noble but impoverished family in Naples, his very name foreshadowed a life marked by suffering. In explaining

This article provides an insightful look at Don Dolindo Ruotolo's beautiful Novena to the Immaculate Conception. It gives background on Don Dolindo's life of suffering and mystical experiences which shaped his spirituality and writings. The novena offers rich reflections on Mary's immaculate holiness, modeling virtue and humility. It highlights her role as refuge for sinners and channel of God's mercy. The article explains how the novena elucidates Church teaching on the Immaculate Conception and applies it to Christian life. It suggests the novena brought hope amidst the crises facing the Church and world when written in 1940. This spiritual gem deserves to be more widely known among English-speaking Catholics.



The Immaculate Conception with Saints Francis of Assisi and Anthony of Padua, 1649-50, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (Il Grechetto) Minneapolis Insitue of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota.



his unusual first name, Don Dolindo wrote, "I was called Dolindo, which means pain."

Physical pain entered his life early on. As an infant he underwent two surgeries, and the family's poverty meant inadequate food, clothing and shoes. His father's strict authoritarianism created a tense home environment. At the fragile age of 14, after his parents' separation, Dolindo entered the minor seminary, leaving behind his difficult home life.

In 1905 he was ordained a priest, but his experiences of ecclesial misunderstanding and rejection began soon after. False accusations led to suspensions from ministry and exile from his religious community. At one point he endured several years without permission to celebrate Mass or minister sacraments. These sufferings shaped his spirituality profoundly, as he learned to radically abandon himself to God's will in the midst of trials.

### Early Mystical Experiences

While suspended from priestly ministry in his early 30s, Don Dolindo began experiencing profound mystical communications from God, which he transcribed. These experiences brought additional incomprehension from church authorities. Not until his late 50s was he fully rehabilitated by the Vatican and allowed to preach, hear confessions, and publish spiritual writings.

Nonetheless, Don Dolindo maintained an attitude of humble obedience, abandoning himself to Divine Providence. He is known for the Surrender or Abandonment Novena.

### Prolific Spiritual Writings

In the 1930s and 1940s, Don Dolindo composed his 33-volume Commentary on Sacred Scripture. He also produced extensive writings on mysticism, numerous letters of spiritual direction, and beautiful novenas that became popular throughout Italy. Central themes of his spirituality included abandonment to God's will, trust in



Divine Mercy, Eucharistic devotion, and Marian consecration. His mystical experiences inspired an ardent love for Scripture and the Catholic faith.

Don Dolindo promoted the role of the laity by forming the "Apostolato Stampa" ("Press Apostolate"), composed of highly educated women and men who helped publish his works. They met in "Schools of Religion" for Scripture study and catechesis. Though these initiatives brought more trouble from church authorities, they bore fruit in the spiritual renewal of many laypeople.

In his extensive Marian writings, Don Dolindo highlighted Mary's virtues of humility, purity, and obedience that allowed her to become the mother of the Savior. He promoted devotion to her. In his last years he produced a profound spiritual treatise on "Mary Immaculate Mother of God and Our Mother."

### Reflecting the Beauty of Holiness

This background gives a glimpse into the deep spirituality behind Don Dolindo's Novena to the Immaculate Conception. Written with poetic eloquence and Scripture-saturated language, the novena provides rich food for reflection on Mary's unique holiness. It draws out the implications of her Immaculate Conception for the

lives of all believers.

The novena opens by calling Mary "the all beautiful" who brings "joy of salvation" like a radiant dawn. Her Immaculate Conception means she is "the greatest splendor of beauty, the most complete voice of praise that can come from a creature." Mary's beauty resides in her fullness of grace, her triumph over sin, and her fruitful obedience in giving birth to the Savior.

Don Dolindo writes that because Mary "had to crush the head of Satan, the quintessence of turpitude, she had to be all beautiful." Her immaculate holiness comes not merely through a gift, but through spiritual victory and cooperation with redemption. "She shines with that mysterious beauty with which God created the first man, indeed, she shines even more because her beauty is not merely a gift but a victory."

### Model of Holiness for All

This novena is not just focused on praising Mary though. Don Dolindo also offers her as a model for believers struggling to live holy lives amidst temptation. "What has ruined us is pride, and what ruins us is pride. Yet what are we? Nothing." The remedy is humble submission to God, repentance for sin, and openness to His transforming grace. "Let us therefore flee the world, the occasions of sin and





Esther Before Ahasuerus, Jacopo Tintoretto, 1552 - 1555, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

the miseries of accursed pride, from which, as from a polluted source, impurity gushes forth."

Mary's immaculate holiness contrasts sharply with our sinfulness, but also offers hope. "We consider the purity of Mary, consecrated to God from her Conception. ... We are pure if we want God to come down to us and accomplish great things in us. What degrades us shamefully and prevents God's action in us is impurity." Gazing at her beauty can inspire us to desire innocence and cultivate virtue. "Let us examine our life, humble ourselves for our past and present ugliness, detest our sins and begin to lead a truly pure life in thoughts, words and deeds."

Mary's humility likewise serves as a model, for "against this scene, we contrast the immaculate conception of Mary, the Woman promised in Eden, who was destined to crush the head of the infernal serpent for the Redeemer. What caused the fall of man? Pride." The remedy is recognizing our nothingness before God. "Let us humbly submit ourselves to God sincerely, acknowledging ourselves as sinners, acknowledging our extreme wretchedness, and the merciful gaze of God will be upon us, restoring innocence through repentance and pouring out grace upon us to make us

capable of every virtue."

### Refuge for Sinners

A striking theme woven through the novena is Mary's role as refuge and advocate for sinners who desire conversion. Don Dolindo presents her as the merciful queen Esther interceding before King Ahasuerus, and the "light of mercy in our darkness and sins, who leads us to Jesus when we are unable to go to Him."

He writes poetically of her maternal advocacy, "Clothed in purity, she cannot tolerate the filthy garment of sinners and comes to them as a Mother to clothe them with grace. But how can she clothe them? She, rich in divine Power, disperses proud thoughts from their hearts, she compels them, humbles them salutarily, and pushes them into the arms of God."

Don Dolindo highlights Mary's title "Refuge of Sinners," explaining "Men consider the wise, the strong, and the generous as the pride of their lineage. ... Mary Most Holy is the seat of wisdom. ... She is supremely beneficent, because she is the channel of God's mercy that flows from generation to generation on those who fear Him. She is our joy, our true heart."

### Hope for the Church

This novena was written by Don

Dolindo in 1940, during a time of anxiety for the world and the Church. He likely saw echoes of his own sufferings in the global crises of the era. World War II loomed, and Catholic culture was under siege. Don Dolindo's emphasis on Mary's intercession suggests he found hope in Marian devotion.

"The evils of the world have not decreased over the course of the years; apostasy has grown and reached the terrifying climax of the most shameless immorality and godlessness," he observed. Yet he believed the Immaculate Conception could bring light amidst encroaching darkness. "The Immaculate will save our sinful and proud generation, and will lead us back to God and to the Church. O Mary, O Mary! It must be the cry of our true devotion to Our Lady."

Though Don Dolindo faced misunderstanding throughout his life, his mystical experiences and deep spirituality shone through his Marian novenas and other writings. His Novena to the Immaculate Conception remains a gift to the Church today. Through meditating on Mary's beauty and holiness, Catholics can grow in their appreciation of her role in salvation history and open themselves more fully to the transforming power of grace. ✠